

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Testimony

Testimony of Representative Bart Stupak

Before the

House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

on the

U.S. Forest Service's Roads Moratorium

March 4, 1999

Madame Chair, thank you for holding this hearing today and for allowing me the opportunity to offer my comments on this important issue. As I testified before this Committee last year on this matter, I have a number of concerns regarding the Forest Service's roads moratorium. This moratorium undermines years of hard work in our national forests and threatens forest health, jobs in the forest industry and our local communities.

First, I am very concerned that the moratorium on forest roads will undermine the hard work by our local citizens and subvert agreements that have been reached in managing our federal lands. In Michigan, a number of parties from all sides of the forestry debate spent years negotiating a management agreement for two national forests in my district, the Ottawa and Hiawatha. A moratorium on new forest roads could jeopardize these agreements, as well as countless others like it around the nation. Instead of allowing regional foresters and local citizens to determine how their forests should be managed, a bureaucratic decision has been made in Washington, D.C. to impose this moratorium on the entire nation.

Second, this moratorium could have an adverse effect on forest health. Since 1991, more trees die and rot each year in national forests than is sold for timber. This new policy will only increase this trend, promoting the outbreak of disease and creating fuel for forest fires. The Forest Service itself estimates that 40 million acres of its forest are at great risk of being consumed by catastrophic wildfire, the majority of which are located in roadless areas. Without the ability to conduct proper forest management activities, the risk of disease outbreak and forest fires increases dramatically.

Thirdly, the roads moratorium could have a significant impact on jobs in the forest industry. According to information provided by the Administration last year, more than 12,000 jobs could be lost as a result of this policy. In my district, which already suffers from high unemployment, the forest industry is one of my top employers. I am very concerned that this moratorium on road building will also cause a moratorium on forest industry jobs.

In addition, this policy could harm the environment on state and private lands. In order to meet the terms of contracts, timber companies will be forced to seek alternative sources of wood to replace the timber that is restricted by the moratorium. As a result, the -pressure will increase to cut more timber on state and private lands, possibly threatening the environment on these lands. Placing a blanket, national moratorium may stop road building on federal lands, but in exchange, it could severely threaten the environment on state and private lands.

Finally, the moratorium could also have a drastic effect on our local communities. By law, counties with national forest lands receive payments equaling 25 percent of gross federal timber revenues. These payments are used by county governments, districts and school boards for education programs and road maintenance. -The Forest Service has been reported to have estimated that this policy could result in the loss of \$160 million in revenue -- a conservative estimate at best. At a time when the PILT program remains woefully underfunded, local communities may be the hardest hit by this moratorium.

Madame Chair, in closing, I would like to touch upon one last, important point. Many of the arguments surrounding these discussions focus on the environmental impact and economic viability of timber programs. While these are certainly important issues, I am afraid that lost in this debate is the impact a roads moratorium would have on working families and rural communities.

As I have stated before, our forests are a vital part of our economy and livelihood in my congressional district. With three national forests in my district, thousands of working families literally rely on these forests to put food on the table. Many people think of the timber industry as giant businesses that slash and clear cut forests simply for profit. The truth is, however, that the majority of people in the timber industry are family businesses -- "mom and pop" operations that are struggling to make ends meet and that truly care about our forests and environment

While attempts to cut forestry programs on our national forests may be made in the name of environmental protection or aimed at large corporations, that is not where their impact is felt the most. Not only do these cuts negatively impact forest health, but they also hurt our counties, our schools, our road programs, our emergency services, and our working families. We, and our forests, can ill afford to continue down this path.

Again, thank you, Madame Chair, for holding this hearing on this important issue. I hope that we can reconsider this ill-advised policy and, instead, work to address the problem of forest health in the future in a more effective and reasonable manner.

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